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Iran's burden of reaction

By Fred Lowe

The government of Iran is becoming increasingly known for its reactionary and repressive character—and for its increasingly important role in the Middle East.

There are now over 24,000 political prisoners in the ruling Shah's prisons and there have been 28 executions carried out in the last three months in closed military trials.

President Nixon, by his long detour to visit the Shah after his trip to the Soviet Union last month, has shown the importance he attaches to the country.

The early 1950s saw the emergence of an extremely popular leader in Iran, Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh, an eloquent nationalist who challenged the Shah's power and called for the nationalization of Iranian oil. In 1951 Mosaddegh nationalized the oil (after Iran in 1958 earned more revenues from its state tobacco monopoly than from petroleum). But in 1953 a coup deposed him, clearly financed, organized and carried out by CIA agents—including such notables as CIA-head Allen Dulles, U.S. Ambassador to Iran Loy Henderson and New Jersey police chief Norman Schwarzkopf.

The U.S. proceeded to help the Shah build up his secret police, SAVAK (currently 60,000 members) and poured \$900 million in defense and economic aid between 1953 and 1960. For the five-year period 1965-1970 military credits amounted to \$1.6 billion; for 1971-1972 they continue at the rate of \$1 billion per year.

Iran is the largest oil-producing country of the Persian Gulf states with U.S. oil companies receiving a 40 percent share and making over two-thirds of the foreign investment there.

Present conditions worse

In the early 1960s, the Shah launched his so-called "white revolution" which was supposed to be a series of reforms which would improve the conditions of the people. But conditions got worse rather than better. Through 1970, 70 percent of the youth over 10 years are still illiterate; there is only one doctor for every 3223 people with less than 12 hospital beds for every 10,000 patients; the average person consumes only about 2.7 pounds of meat per month on a \$75-a-year income. Over 40 percent of the families (Iran has a population of 30 million with 3.5 million crowded into its capital, Teheran) live in one room. Most of these dwellings are made of mud or wood and because of the government's unwillingness to improve their fragility, over 49,500 Iranians have died needlessly from earthquakes in recent years.

The Confederation of Iranian Students, including its chapters in the U.S., raised more than \$40,000 which was sent to Iran (following the 1958 earthquake that killed 20,000 people in Khorasan) along with medicine and a medical team. The money was used to build a school and a hospital.

\$800 million celebration

In October of last year, one of the most psychotic spectacles ever to occur in this century took place in Iran, with the "celebration" of Iran's 2500th year in existence. Amidst all this poverty the Shah had

the audacity to spend over \$800 million for this affair when the yearly expenditures for health, education and welfare amount to a scant total of \$8 million or one-hundredth of the amount spent on the celebration. This event caused such an international outrage that most heads of state who had been invited, backed out of showing up and only 200 people came.

In fact, to ensure that things ran smoothly, 4000 people were imprisoned before the "celebration" and still have not been released.

Military vs guerrillas

In 1972, Iran has devoted more than 33 percent of its budget (\$895 million) to military expenditures. Guerrilla activity has been stepped up in the last two years by liberation movements in Iran and the government has arrested and tortured thousands of people.

Iran has also been chosen by the U.S. to be the "Brazil of the Gulf area"—to act as police in trying to crush liberation movements in the region. The guerrilla struggle in Dhofar, in southern Oman and the successful liberation of Southern Yemen (to form the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) in 1967 have already caused considerable worry to U.S. and British imperialists.

The 20th annual convention of the Iranian Students Association in the U.S. (ISAUS) was held in Berkeley June 17-22 to discuss future activities to bring greater international attention to the repressive character of the Iranian government. The group has been outlawed in Iran and the penalty there for membership is extremely severe. Despite this, the group has been enormously effective in reaching the public.

Plan future actions

The conference ended with some very definite plans for future strategies and actions. The decision was made to form local committees made up of lawyers, journalists and professors to form pressure groups that will publicize conditions in Iran and will have as its goal the granting to these various groups the right to observe trials and also prison conditions in Iran.

In June 1970, 41 Bay Area ISA members were arrested by the San Francisco police while protesting at the Iranian Consulate and their passports have not been renewed. They are facing deportation and years in the Shah's prisons. The Confederation of Iranian Students will launch a worldwide campaign demanding the Iranian Consulate extend their passports. Activities on Northern California campuses will be stepped up and a legal committee will be formed to defend the 41 and prevent the Immigration Department from deporting them. ISA plans to start a research project that will more clearly expose the Nixon Doctrine in Iran. It also plans to hold a worldwide "Vietnam Week" after the summer to support the PRG 7-point peace plan and to raise funds for the NLF. Finally, ISA issued statements of solidarity with the workers of the world, especially third world workers and the U.S. farmworkers and dockworkers.

For further information contact the Iranian Students Association P.O. Box 808, Berkeley, Calif., 94701.

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